



U.S. Interests Section Newsletter

Information for American Citizens in Cuba
Volume 1 Issue 2
April - June 2008



FIRST TRAVEL DOCUMENTS ISSUED UNDER CUBAN FAMILY REUNIFICATION PAROLE PROGRAM

On April 10, 2008, Chief of Mission Michael Parmly delivered the first official travel documents to an eligible Cuban family under the Cuban Family Reunification Program (CFRP) in a ceremony in the Interests Section. The CFRP is jointly administered by the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security through the US Citizenship and Immigration Services. USCIS Field Office Director, and DHS representative, James McCament also attended the ceremony.

The CFRP offers beneficiaries of approved family-based immigrant visa petitions the opportunity to receive parole into the United States rather than remain in Cuba to apply for lawful permanent resident status. The purpose of the program is to expedite family reunification through safe, legal and orderly channels of migration to the United States and to discourage dangerous and irregular maritime migration. The CFRP dramatically reduces the waiting time for individuals or families eligible to immigrate to the United States. Approximately 12,000 immigrant visa petitioners have been notified that their family members are eligible for the CFRP and, to date, more than 5,000 of them have asked to participate in the program.



For more information on the CFRP program, please visit the website www.uscis.gov or call the USCIS National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283.



"I refuse to accept the view that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality."

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

January 21st, was Martin Luther King, Jr. day. The civil rights leader and his life work were celebrated at the Chief of Mission Residence with a n evening of poetry and music followed by a reception.

Black History Month followed in February. Originally established as Black History week in 1926, the remembrance of important people and events in the African diaspora was expanded to a month long event during the 1976 centennial.



NEW STATE DEPARTMENT WEBSITE FOR STUDENTS

www.studentsabroad.state.gov is being launched. The site will offer college students a one-stop reference for international travel. The website offers country specific information, tips for safe travel, and other important information.

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US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

In 2008 there will be open races for both parties' presidential nominations.

For the first time since 1952 a sitting president or vice president is not a candidate for nomination of either major party. After several years of positioning and planning by presidential hopefuls, voters finally had their say starting with the Jan. 3, 2008 Iowa caucuses. Iowa and subsequent January contests winnowed the field, and eight candidates ended their campaigns during the month. "Super-Duper" Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2008 saw an unprecedented primaries and caucuses in 24 state. More contests followed in February. The March 4 primaries in Ohio, Texas, Vermont and Rhode Island decided the Republican nomination, while the Democratic race remains hotly contested heading into the Pennsylvania primary on April 22.

IMPORTANT ELECTION DATES

April 23-26, 2008: [2008 Constitution Party National Convention](#), to be held in [Kansas City, Missouri](#).

May 23-26, 2008: [2008 Libertarian National Convention](#), to be held in [Denver, Colorado](#).

July 10-13, 2008: [Green Party National Convention](#), to be held in [Chicago, Illinois](#).

August 25-28, 2008: [2008 Democratic National Convention](#), to be held in [Denver, Colorado](#).

September 1-4, 2008: [2008 Republican National Convention](#), to be held in [Saint Paul, Minnesota](#).

[November 4, 2008](#): All 50 states and the [District of Columbia](#) will [hold elections](#) to select members of the Electoral College.

[December 15, 2008](#): Members of the U.S. Electoral College meet in each state to cast their votes for President and Vice President.

[January 6, 2009](#): Electoral votes officially tallied before both Houses of Congress. If a member of Congress wishes to object to the certification of a state's electoral votes as was originally reported on Election Night, he or she must do so at this point, even if recounts or lawsuits to require a recount are already in progress.



ABSENTEE VOTING

Any registered voter may request an absentee ballot, rather than going to the polls on Election Day. Each of the fifty-five states and territories has differing policies and rules regarding how to register and vote absentee.

If you do not maintain a legal residence in the U.S. your legal state of residence for voting purposes is the state or territory where you last resided immediately prior to your departure from the United States. This applies to overseas citizens even though you may not have property or other ties in your last state or territory of residence and your intent to return to that state or territory may be uncertain.

Some states allow children of U.S. citizens overseas who are U.S. citizens but who have never resided in the U.S. to claim one of their parent's legal state or territory of residence as their own. Each state determines who is resident and eligible to vote in the state.

However, a person who is born of U.S. citizens, who is living abroad, and who has never lived in Florida, is not allowed to register to vote in Florida. It requires the person to have had at a minimum some physical residential presence there at some point.

When completing the Federal Post Card Application Voting Residence section, be sure to enter the entire mailing address of your last residence, including street or rural route and number. The address determines your proper district, ward, precinct and parish for voting purposes. Absentee voting card registration deadlines vary by state, but it is best to plan to get them in early. Most deadlines are in September and early October for the November 2nd, 2008 election.

More information can be obtained at
<http://www.fvap.gov>

The American Citizens Services Unit is Here to Help!!

Here is a list of some of the emergency services we provide:

Lost or Stolen Passports: If you lose your passport, ACS can help you obtain a replacement. In case of theft, you should immediately report the incident to Cuban police and obtain a copy of the police report.

Medical Assistance: If you are sick or injured, ACS can assist you in finding medical care and can contact family or a friend at your request.

Emergency Funds: If your money has been lost or stolen, ACS can help you contact your family or friends and arrange for them to transfer funds to you.

Arrests: Americans in Cuba are subject to Cuban law. In the unfortunate event that an American is arrested, the United States government cannot get the citizen out of jail. ACS can provide a list of local attorneys and legal resources, visit the arrestee to monitor treatment, and act as a liaison between family and friends in the U.S. ACS can also assist families in transferring money, food, and clothing to those being held in Cuban jails or prisons.

Death abroad: In the unfortunate event of a death in Cuba, we can work with family in the U.S to arrange for the transfer of remains from Cuba.

Disasters: ACS can contact your relatives to let them know that you are safe in the case of a natural disaster.

Emergency situation: It is a good idea if you give your family in the U.S the following number at the State Department to call in an emergency situation: (202) 647-5225



SOCIAL SECURITY ACCESSING BENEFITS ABROAD



Am I eligible for Social Security Benefits?

The Social Security Administration will determine individual's eligibility for benefits. The administration may require proof of identity and work history in adjudicating claims.

Can I receive benefits while overseas?

If you are not a U.S. citizen your payments will stop after you have been outside the U.S. for six full calendar months.

When we say you are outside the U.S., we mean that you are not in one of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands or American Samoa. Once you have been out of the U.S. for at least 30 days in a row, you are considered to be outside the country until you return and stay in the U.S. for at least 30 days in a row.

If you are living outside the U.S., periodically the Social Security Administration will send you a questionnaire. This lets them figure out if you still are eligible for benefits. In addition to responding to the questionnaire, notify them promptly about changes that could affect your payments. If you fail to report something or deliberately make a false statement, you could be penalized by a fine or imprisonment. You also may lose some of your payments if you do not report changes promptly.

How do US Treasury Regulations affect my payments?

U.S. Treasury Department regulations prohibit sending payments to you if you are in Cuba or North Korea. If you are a U.S. citizen and are in Cuba or North Korea, you can receive all of your payments that were withheld once you leave that country and live in another country where we can send payments. Generally, if you are not a U.S. citizen, you cannot receive any payments for months in which you live in one of these countries, even though you leave that country and satisfy all other requirements.

More information can be obtained at <http://www.ssa.gov>.



Thank you to all the wardens for their hard work. In March a highly successful test of the warden system was performed with the overwhelming majority of the wardens in country responding in a timely manner. We also appreciate the updated warden lists that the wardens have provided.

Contact Information: American Citizen Services,
Consular Section,

U.S. Interests Section, Havana, Cuba

Address: Calzada e/ L y M. Vedad, Ciudad Habana

Telephone: (53)(7) 8333551 to 59, Fax (57)(3) 833-1653

Website: <http://havana.usinterestsection.gov/>

Walk-in Hours: Mon.-Thu. 8:00-4:30pm, Fri. 8:00-3:30 pm.

Closed the first Friday of each month, U.S. & Cuban Holidays

New Changes in Passport Application Forms and Fees



The American Citizen Services Department, informs that since February 1, 2008 there are new passport application forms. These passport application forms are available on <http://www.travel.state.gov>.

- DS-11 Application for a U.S. Passport
- DS-82 Application for a U.S. Passport by Mail
- DS-4085 Application for Additional Visa Pages and Miscellaneous Passport Services
- DS-5504 Re-Application for a U.S. Passport (Name Change, Data Correction, Limited Passport Replacement)
- DS-3053 Statement of Consent or Special Circumstances: Issuance of a Passport to a Minor under the Age of 16

New Passport Fees in USD and CUC

- First time applicants (Adults) \$100 USD or \$93 CUC
- First time applicants (Children) \$ 85 USD or \$79 CUC
- Renewals (Adults) \$ 75 USD or \$70 CUC
- Renewals (Children) \$ 85 USD or \$79 CUC

PASSPORT CARD RULE IMPLEMENTATION

The Department of State expects to start issuing passport cards by the Spring 2008 in response to the needs of border resident communities for a less expensive and more portable alternative to the traditional passport book. However, one need not live along the border to apply. The card will have the same period of validity as the passport book: ten years for an adult, and five for children 15 and younger. The passport application fee is \$20 for adults and \$10 for minors.

The passport card will facilitate entry and expedite document processing at land and sea ports of entry when arriving from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda.

The card may not/not be used to travel by air. The passport card is by definition a passport and will be considered proof of U.S. citizenship. It will otherwise carry the rights and privileges of the U.S. passport book, and will be adjudicated to the exact same standards. Further information about applying for a U.S. passport card will be available on travel.state.gov.